

Safety, Community & Dignity Will Help Cure Homelessness

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By Pete DeLaunay

Don't pass the homeless by, look them in the eye and hope for better days ahead as part of our greater community, paraphrased from **Fr. Steve Sundborg's** invocation that set the tone for the day's program about homelessness and specifically programs to support homeless youth.

Kristine Scott, Executive Director at ROOTS young adult shelter explained how so many 18-25 year old young adults end up homeless when they leave the foster care system with little hope and no place to sleep. "We work to get to know people and to meet their needs with consistency and compassion," she said. "We work to provide a pathway to stability by providing a place to sleep and shower for 45 young people every night."



ROOTS provided services to 600 young adults last year with "caring programs" helping youth find employment and working with them on how to live independently. "Youth come to ROOTS carrying a lot of broken promises from a system they no longer trust and don't expect it to work for them," she continued. "They come in viewing me as another white lady with a clipboard."

She introduced a young black man who entered the ROOTS program with low esteem and low expectations. He talked of his 18 years in the State of Georgia's foster system where he lived in several different homes, transferring to 20 different schools. Perhaps an exception to the general stereotype, he had no criminal record and did not use drugs or alcohol, but wanted to better himself.

He came to Washington State with \$300 in his pocket, no friends or support system of any kind. He said the people at ROOTS went out of their way to help people like him – relieving the uncertainty about where to sleep and about the next meal. "ROOTS helped me get on my feet,"

he said. He now works two jobs and supports his preschool aged child in a stable living environment with hobbies and faith.



Ms. Scott dispelled the stereotype of the "crusty old guy" by explaining how families and young people find themselves displaced and in need of jobs. ROOTS has created a five week program to help homeless youth find employment and a "way out the back door" of the shelter they provide.

The presentation about ROOTS and its important work was preceded by a short program offered by Tim Durkan (yep, Jenny's older brother) who walks the streets of Seattle making friends and taking pictures of people on the street and in dire straits. "Heroin and methamphetamine are everywhere from rural communities to middle America – largely starting with prescription pain meds that put the monkey on their backs," he said. He showed several images including 'Broadway Mike' who thanks to the Plymouth Housing Group now has a place to live, leaving his isolation and loneliness behind.



Fellow Rotarian with Plymouth Housing Group, **Lynn Beck**, says housing is just the beginning...the first step to building hope and transforming lives. She was joined at the podium by Rotarian **Jeff Pyatt** who will be one of eight "celebrities," paired with a professional dancer, competing in Seattle Dances (similar to TV's *Dancing with the Stars*) to raise funds for Plymouth Housing's important work. Visit the website to learn more and cheer Jeff on.



President Mark opened the meeting with Steve Sunborg's thoughtful invocation, followed by the day's anthem *Let There Be Peace on Earth* led by **Arnie Ness** on the trumpet, accompanied by **Ken Grant** on the piano – and performed by the Rotary Peacemakers Committee. **Jan Levy** introduced new member, **Jane Nishita**, a 30-year telecommunications professional who brings a wealth of community service experience to our club.

Seattle Rotary Service Foundation Chair, **Kathy Williams** reported that 77% of our members have contributed to the SRSF fund this year or about 84% of our \$250,000 goal. She said 52% of our members have contributed to the Rotary International Foundation – encouraging all members to 'pay up' to help fund our various community service projects.

President Mark concluded the meeting, as Rotarians left the room understand how much a negative trajectory can change when someone cares – putting wind in their sails and looking every homeless person in the eye as we pass them by.